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ABSTRACT

Counselors should strive to improve perceptions of the guidance program and counselor functions as well as the guidance process and resulting product. It is essential that the functions performed, and the manner in which they are performed, be evaluated through both internal and external assessment. The following steps are recommended for program evaluation: (1) conduct a needs assessment, and survey counselor concerns and values; (2) develop broad goals and specific objectives of the program; (3) establish specific objectives for each counselor; (4) organize realistic priorities; (5) evaluate counselor effectiveness; (6) revise objectives and explore alternatives; and (7) communicate with other counselors and the public. (SJL)

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GUIDANCE PROGRAM EVALUATION - THE COUNSELOR'S ROLE

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Guidance Program Evaluation - The Counselor's Role

What is the counselor's role in program evaluation? What functions does this individual perform?

Counselors must be concerned with evaluation and improvement of individual activities that contribute to the total program. The unconcerned and uninvolved counselor will certainly be eliminated in the name of economy. In Pennsylvania, few counselors have been fired or furloughed because of economic reasons. School districts are reducing teachers yet retaining counselors. However, counselors have been active, vocal in demonstrating accountability.

As professional counselors, our main concerns must be directed toward both individual and program evaluation that will result in more efficient and higher quality services for kids.

Lee Cronbach defines evaluation "as the collection and use of information to make decisions about an educational program". (Cronbach, 1964)

Others have suggested that counseling norms be developed to answer such questions as:

1. How well does counselor X perform relative to specific criteria?
2. Which of several counselors performs best with respect to these criteria?
3. Is the value received worth the cost of obtaining a specific level and type of performance? (Hill, 1967)

These questions have been asked for years and have yet to be satisfactorily answered. N. L. Gage refers to this as a "criteria of effectiveness" paradigm and notes it has failed to yield substantial results. (Hill, 1967)

The individual counselor is the key to any guidance program. Therefore, the individual counselor must be considered the key to proper evaluation. I maintain that there are several interconnected areas relative to the evaluation of guidance programs. The first type pertains to the counselors, their perceptions and how they are perceived by their supervisor.

The second type deals with how well the counselor fu[illegible]ions in a technical sense, how well are the accepted counseling techniques performed and what is the success ratio. Finally, the combination of individual counselor values and functions will result in the total guidance program. This can be extremely small or as big as space itself.

Type I Evaluation - Self-Supervisor

This type of evaluation seems to be the most apparent but for some reason, it is often overlooked by both supervisors and counselors. It can serve as a useful professional method to evaluate counselors and provide a line of communication for the supervisor.

Each individual counselor lists the ten or twelve functions that must be achieved to have a quality guidance program. These are services that you feel so strongly about that you would defend them before a group of district administrators and before the school board. Place this list in rank order. You now have formalized your guidance values. The combined staff list will constitute the values for the guidance program.

Evaluation is the measurement of what is valued. Indicate how you are going to achieve these guidance values and then how you plan to determine your success or failure to achieve each value. After several days of reflecting on these values, title the list "My Guidance Plan for the Year", arrange a meeting with your supervisor, discuss your guidance program values and indicate to your supervisor that you desire to be evaluated in relation to these goals.

At the conclusion of the year, prepare a short narrative explaining how you achieved, or why you failed to achieve, each goal and request that your supervisor do the same. Exchange narratives, wait several days and meet to discuss differences. Education will occur on both sides. If a final combined narrative cannot be agreed upon, file both narrative evaluation reports and indicate areas and reason of disagreement. This is a sound approach to the evaluation of a professional and will provide both vertical and horizontal growth.

Type II - Technical Competency Evaluation

Some will contrast the recording of counselor time and function against guidance needs and refer to this as a process evaluation. In a superficial way it might be so considered, but I would like to challenge the individual counselor to develop process evaluation techniques to evaluate their individual effectiveness as a counselor.

This professional evaluation should be self-initiated, recorded or video taped and reviewed in concert with experts or knowledgeable peers. It is a most difficult but most enlightening experience.

To be useful, evaluation of process must provide a direct measure of behavior change of knowledge learned as a result of contact with the counselor. Perhaps the following approach could be used:

1. Detail each task, formulate specific behavioral objectives and write implementation strategies.
2. Describe what a student who has achieved the specific objectives does that distinguishes that student from one who has not achieved the objectives.

3. Outline precise situations that require the learners to demonstrate whether they can react in a knowledgeable way.
4. Develop a pre-determined method for recording and evaluating responses to situations.

These four suggested steps, if nothing else, will lead to job security. Counselors who truthfully and routinely practice self-examination and self-evaluation in order to improve their performance will never be furloughed.

Only by proper program planning and the self-discipline necessary to adhere to pre-determined objectives will the counselor have time for self-evaluation.

As classroom teachers many of us had written daily lesson plans and a course syllabus. Perhaps as counselors we need a daily written plan with specific strategies for implementation of specific counseling objectives. We would never allow crisis situations to interrupt our classroom. Yet as counselors we almost let them destroy our program. Maybe we should not be so willing to say "yes." Evaluation components for these functions could be reviewed to determine the most effective techniques. Workable techniques could be matched with student characteristics.

Assessment devices might include role-playing, group activities, multiple choice tests and guidance simulation activities.

In-depth process evaluation should examine whether or not your exposure, your contact and your counseling makes a measurable difference in the lives, actions, thoughts and beliefs of your clients.

As you weigh your guidance values and refine your individual criteria, you must consider the following administrative or program concerns:

1. Desirability - Establishment of a sound rationale for the commitment of necessary resources.
2. Feasibility - Issues of interest in this domain are related to questions of management, cost and alternative development possibilities.
3. Effectiveness - Specific nature of service and method of assessment.
4. Usability - What population will use the service. Identify and characterize implementation strategies (Borich, 1974).

Counselors now have "straight in their heads" their own guidance values and some realistic perceptions of ways to energize quality services. Now you must question if your individual techniques are affecting your audience in a positive way. Are your guidance values in concert with the local philosophy and, if not, why not. Is your individual performance in concert with your professional responsibilities -- with your knowledge and skill level?

Type III - Guidance Program Evaluation

The study and evaluation of guidance programs has received considerable attention in the last several years.

Most evaluation programs require students, teachers and parents to recall factual information or respond to checklists relative to guidance services. Certain sample evaluation instruments can be used as a quick method for evaluating guidance programs on a statewide basis in a diversity of school situations. This type of instrument does not measure program quality and is generally a superficial approach to evaluation (May, 1975). Meaningful program evaluation requires:

1. A systematic scheme for the collection and analysis of data.
2. Development of program goals and specific program objectives.
3. Strategies for implementation of specific program objectives.
4. Sound and logical methods to assess each program objective. (Guidelines for Self-Study, 1974).

Two excellent sources for counseling departments planning such a study are Guidelines for Self-Study of a School District (PDE, 1974) and Guidance Program Development Model (State Education Department, New York).

About 25 school districts in Pennsylvania have conducted studies of their guidance programs. My chief recommendation for schools considering this type of project would be that they should employ outside consultants to work with the districts to organize and manage the project. Counselors have neither the time nor the expertise to analyze, develop and "push" for proper program development.

Thus, in summary, the counselor should strive to improve perceptions of the guidance program and counselor functions as well as the guidance process and the resulting product. This cannot be accomplished without evaluation. The functions performed, the manner in which they are performed -- where you are and where you are going -- can only be realized through assessment, external and internal, real and perceived. The following steps should be considered when a total guidance program is being developed or revised:

1. Survey and list the needs of students, parents and teachers for guidance services plus the counselor's professional leadership concerns and guidance values.

2. Develop either individually or by committee, a guidance philosophy unique to the program, broad program goals and specific program objectives.
3. Establish specific objectives for each counselor.
4. Organize realistic priorities. Present to school district administrators. (Prepare to say "No." Have alternative suggestions for anticipated problem areas).
5. Evaluate your effectiveness as a counselor. Explore new delivery systems, determine school cycles, conduct individual time studies by function, video-tape and critique individual and group counseling sessions, etc.
6. Revise objectives, explore alternative methods and techniques for achieving objectives, discuss and gain cooperation of administration and teachers.
7. Communication with other counselors and to the public. Tell the world everything good you do.

Strive to do those tasks that are professional and that require someone with your unique skills. If the function could be done by a clerical worker, a student or a parent, you are misusing taxpayer money. Take the offensive. Stand tall and be proud, for you constitute the backbone of the system. You are the student counselor.

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